

VZCZCXRO9149
PP RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHLB #0236/01 0451616
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 141616Z FEB 08 ZDK DUE TO NUMEROUS REQUESTS
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1006
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 2224
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1955

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000236

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/HARDING
STATE FOR INL/AEE, NEA/ELA
ROME FOR DHS/ICE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/13/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NAS](#) [PTER](#) [IS](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)
SUBJECT: MINISTER OF INTERIOR WELCOMES ENHANCED COOPERATION
WITH U.S.

BEIRUT 00000236 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: In a February 13, 2008 introductory meeting pro-Hariri Interior Minister Hassan As-Sabaa welcomed Ambassador and communicated his strong interest in the active collaboration between the USG and the MOI in security related matters. He stressed the continuing need for further assistance for not only the Internal Security Forces (ISF), but also for the Directorate General of General Security (Surete General - SG), the two key internal security related agencies under MOI's authority. Discussing the MOI preparations to guard against an outbreak of violence on February 14 due to the converging of thousands in Beirut to attend rival faction sponsored events, Sabaa stated that meticulous plans had been put into place by the ISF and Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) to minimize the possibility of violence. The Minister provided a brief overview of his Ministry's role in border security, highlighting in the particular the important immigration and border inspection functions of the Surete Generale. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) The Ministry of Interior has authority over the ISF and the SG. Its current minister since 2005, Hassan Sabaa, a Sunni, is a member of the March 14 coalition and has close ties with the Hariri family. In his welcoming remarks to the Ambassador and INL Lebanon Director he referenced the strong and close relationship his Ministry has had with the USG. Desirous of continuing and strengthening those ties, Sabaa remarked on the significant and unending need for training and equipment to strengthen the ISF and make it a national force, capable of providing internal security and protection for all Lebanese.

USG Assistance to ISF Through INL's
Police Modernization Program

¶3. (U) Providing an overview of the USG's commitment to enhance the professionalism and effectiveness of the ISF, Ambassador introduced the Embassy's new INL Director and outlined the current progress of the new INL Lebanon Police Modernization Program, funded by Congress last year with a \$60 million supplemental appropriation. She noted that two thirds of these funds will be used to provide training to 8,000 ISF cadets and 1,200 instructors, refurbish the Police

Academy, the Central Control and Command Center, and 18 additional police substations throughout the country, provide state-of-the-art communications equipment, 300 unarmored police vehicles, individual police gear for 4,000 policemen and police riot gear and civil disorder management equipment for 2000 more.

¶4. (U) The Minister thanked the Ambassador and reiterated that the ISF needs considerable training and equipment to make it a truly effective force. Any and all assistance the USG can provide in this regard is welcomed and his ministry will cooperate fully in having the programs implemented by his directorates. He stressed that much had been done to raise the level of the ISF during Prime Minister Siniora's administration. The number of its personnel rose from 13,000 to 24,000. In 2005 only 8,000 ISF members had pistols and rifles and now all have weapons, he reported. He conceded, however, that they have a continuing need for more training and equipment, as well as upgraded facilities.

Current Security Situation

¶5. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's query on security preparations for handling the two large events planned on February 14 (the anniversary of former PM Hariri's assassination, and the funeral for Hezbollah military commander Imad Mughniyah killed the day before in Syria), Sabaa calmly responded that the LAF, SG and ISF are cooperating to provide full security in Beirut. Sabaa noted that a central situation room had been established, with all security forces, including ISF, LAF, and State Security, together monitoring the evolving situation, and therefore able to react immediately if any unrest occurred. To prevent against an increased risk of violence arising if both groups passed each other in the streets, the ISF and LAF have set up

BEIRUT 00000236 002 OF 002

increased security near Baabda and Beirut International Airport and the ISF is 100 percent deployed throughout all of Beirut. Traffic control would divert the two factions down different roadways to minimize the possibility of conflict arising through chance meetings on the streets. Sabaa mentioned that he was pleased to hear that Hezbollah did not put out an official call for followers to gather to mourn the death of their military leader. Hezbollah had informed them that they will each have to arrive separately, utilizing their own transportation, and not Hezbollah-provided buses.

¶6. (C) Sabaa attributes the current political tension to the March 8 faction and Syria, which he states wants to continue the political vacuum caused by the delay in the presidential elections. The aim has been to ignite small outbreaks of petty violence to create an atmosphere of insecurity and instability to prevent a large turnout at the February 14 rally commemorating Hariri.

Border Security and the SG

¶7. (U) When asked what role the MOI has in border security, the Minister responded that the only role is through the SG with its immigration-related functions. He said that customs is handled through the Ministry of Finance and that the LAF covers the ports, but that SG fills the immigration inspector function at the Beirut International Airport (BIA) and mans four land border crossing points. He explained that currently the ISF has no border security role, but that once the Common Border Project pilot program gets underway, the ISF will occupy the position of Assistant Commander to LAF's Commander. According to Sabaa, although the Pilot Program started two and one half months ago, nothing has happened to date with it, and he is unaware of ISF's activity in border protection to date, outside of its security role in policing at the BIA.

18. (U) Sabaa welcomed any assistance and training the USG could provide for the SG. He noted that it holds an important role in his Ministry, both in terms of its immigration role, but also its security and information functions.

SISON